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THE QUESTION OF THE HOUR

by Donald R. Richberg

Broadly stated, the question of the hour is: Can a modern people obtain a satisfactory security and still retain the historic essentials of individual liberty?

In more narrowly political terms, the same question reads: Can a democratic government be made capable of meeting its increasing responsibilities, or is an authoritarian control of human affairs essential to the orderly, safe progress of mankind?

We cannot answer this question by mere assertions of faith in popular government and reaffirmations of our love of liberty. Millions of people will accept unpopular government to save themselves from want and fear. They will sacrifice liberty to starve and suffer, in order to gain negative freedom from emptiness and pain. They may have been foolish to drift into waters where they cannot swim, but once out of their depth they will not quibble over the character and ultimate purposes of those who promise to come to their rescue.

On the other hand, we cannot answer the question by assuming that the inefficiencies and follies of a democratic government are congenital and incurable, or by assuming that the efficiency of a tyranny is a guarantee of wisdom in the rulers, or of security for the subjects.

We should seek our answer in a cold analysis of the weaknesses of representative government and in a search for those changes in political methods, and above all those changes in prevailing thought, which might transform our political action from emotional blundering into consistent, reasonable progress toward practical as well as desired goals.

We have all seen a football team, composed of good players, well-trained and provided with effective plays, but floundering around, unable to score, unable to stop an aggressive opposition. Then we have seen that same team come to life and win a game that seemed to be lost. What happened? They found out (or were told) where they were failing to use their power, where individual ability was not being co-ordinated into team play. They became inspired with a reviving confidence in their ability to win, in their ability as a team to play a better game than the opponents.

The analogy is very close. Turn your eyes back to 1941. The democratic teams were losing in the World Bowl. The war in Russia was only a

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contest between two totalitarian teams so that, however it ended, democracy would not be a winner. The attack on Pearl Harbor seemed for the moment demoralizing. But it taught America, in one fearful blazing lesson, the weaknesses of rigid individualism and isolationism in a world-wide conflict between free peoples and subject peoples.

II

Melancholy theorists have assumed that we were forced to accept dictatorship in order to beat the dictators. We did no such thing. What we did do was to accept the need of discipline in a time of common peril. We permitted our self-chosen representatives to think and act for us, subject to our ultimate right to veto their programs and to replace them when conditions permitted us once more safely to assert a mass opinion and to override the opinions of specialists. In the meantime we knew that we must trust our leaders to guide us according to their lights, and that it was our job to follow them faithfully, even when we might doubt their wisdom.

We came out of the war, as we went in, a self-governing people, cherishing individual liberty. In this present trial of our democratic order we might well glimpse the answer to the question that is of such supreme importance today. Let us now rephrase it, still more precisely. Must our government become an absolute authority to which all must submit, in order to meet its responsibilities in a complex, industrialized civilization? When the individual by his own industry and thrift cannot assure himself of a livelihood against all the hazards arising from his dependence on so many others in a complicated economy, must he seek security by having that economy and his daily living regulated in detail by a few master minds exercising tyrannical authority?

Such an authority was not needed to win our greatest war and it is not needed to win the goals of peace. But what is needed is to determine exactly how far national authority and national co-operation are absolutely necessary, or supremely useful, to give a reasonable security of livelihood to all our people. Then, after determining the area, we must firmly restrict the exercise of the power of national compulsion to that area. What is needed is a widespread understanding that government, while the guardian and savior of a healthy economy, is not the creator. Therefore it should not be the commander of the energies of a people, which rise out of an infinite variety of individual ambitions and wills to pursue happiness.

There are emergencies of peace as of war, times when we ought to exert a national authority, or extend national aid to distressed per-

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sons in a locality or throughout the world. But there should be a time limit on such emergency action, and no opportunity given to bureaucracy to entrench itself in power and to gather a host of dependents upon its favor, demanding its perpetuation.

Every enlargement of government activities calls for more taxes and more submission to political controls. More taxes mean less money for individual spending; and more political controls mean less individual liberty. Every citizen, offered the bribe of a political favor, should realize that he will be called upon to pay for all the other bribes that are necessary to maintain a majority of favored people behind the politicians who always take more money out of the taxpayer's pocket than he ever gets back.

III

The strength of an authoritarian government does not lie in the intellectual power of the ruling class. It lies in their control of popular thinking. This power may originate in the thought control of a small group of fanatics. It may be sustained at first by systematic terror and repression of opponents. But eventually the control of mass opinion, by propaganda and education, particularly of the young, is necessary. Every modern dictatorship is maintained by continually exciting the emotions and prejudices of the subject population, supplemented by ruthless extermination or suppression of intelligent criticism.

No such unity of mental support can be obtained in a free society. But a political religion can be preached; and if it appeals to the large number of people who are capable of thinking for themselves it will be impressed on masses who absorb ideas without much thought.

The tenets of a political religion which would effectively support the system of representative government in a modern civilization may be summed up as follows:

(1) Select representatives who are worthy to represent you and then leave them free to serve you and all the people according to their best judgment. A political phonograph playing the records you dictate will do you no good in the long run. Most of the time you yourself do not fully understand what you are talking about, but are just a parrot.

(2) In this day of scientific and economic problems, utterly beyond ordinary understanding, put your technical trust in scientific experts. They may sometimes be unfaithful or wrong-headed, but if so other experts will expose them and the phonies will lose influence.

(3) Demand integrity and honesty in both representatives and experts. Remember that a liar or a crook who works for you will also work against you.

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(4) Retain the continuous right of popular criticism and the ultimate right of veto, but guard yourself against false propaganda and emotional demands for a hasty veto.

(5) Never give up your individual liberty of action unless you are convinced that concerted action for the general welfare is so necessary that you are willing personally to sacrifice what is dear to you for the common good.

IV

The answer to the challenge of the enemies of representative government is to make that well-tried system stronger, first in the soul and then in the body of our Republic. The way to make it stronger is not disclosed by mere denunciation of the arrogance and the dishonesty of those who believe that progress toward universal happiness can be made by political devices and controls, devised and operated by a few master minds.

The way to make this Federal Republic stronger is, first, to decide what things must be done by the national government because they are absolutely necessary to prevent or to remedy calamitous conditions, and because they cannot be done either by the people themselves or by local governments. Then, second, to veto the doing of anything else by the national government, so that individual liberty will be preserved so far as possible from the inevitable tyranny and corruption of centralized political power.

When local government, and self-government, are effective, the confidence of a free people will be reinspired in a national government, which does only the things that are generally regarded as necessary for it to do, and which is therefore able, with popular support, to accomplish its tasks effectively.

Then the confidence of a free people will also be reinspired in themselves, as the masters of their own destiny, and they will cease to respect, or to imitate, slavish people who are willing to submit their lives and fortunes to the dictatorship of other men.

Donald R. Richberg, one-time General Counsel and later head of the NRA, and Director of the National Emergency Council, is also well-known for his writings on political and economic subjects.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VII, No. 4

By Frank C. Hanighen January 25, 1950

TAX MESSAGE: The President's tax message of January 23 offered so little that was new and had been so well discounted in advance that the stock market showed practically no reaction. Nor could the editorial writers discern in it any long-term philosophy about taxation that would provide the basis for a sound economy. Airily, the Chief Executive laid down one point in his program as "to encourage and stimulate business expansion which will result in more revenue". Apart from a reduction in the "notch" rate for small business, and liberalization of the loss carry-forward provision, there was nothing to implement this point in the program. For instance, the President innocently remarked that there is no financial obstruction "to a steady expansion of business investment". Apparently he has not examined the situation in which corporations pay a thumping income tax and their stockholders' dividends suffer from double taxation.

The next day U.S. Steel, at a Senate hearing, presented evidence that it was required to devote a great part of its current earnings to modernization of plant, development and expansion. Vice-President Munson of that firm disclosed a vast project to extract iron ore in Venezuela, to replace the Mesabi ore source. Some little acquaintance with the facts of finance would suggest that the capital investment market -- about which Mr. Truman seems so optimistic -- will be even less inclined to put up equity money if another billion in taxes is placed on the shoulders of corporations; which incidentally cast comparatively few votes.

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RULES COMMITTEE: You would never know it from the press, but this past week has seen the Second Coming of Uncle Joe Cannon to the House of Representatives. Uncle Joe was the old party who, for many years, kept the House well disciplined by rules which enabled him as Speaker to determine whether any bill would be debated or passed. Back in 1910, a coalition finally overthrew his power, and Uncle Joe has been dead for many years. Last year, he came back -- in spirit -- in the person of that great "liberal" Sam Rayburn, bosom pal of Harry Truman. In January, 1949, Sam "liberalized" the rules so the "r'actionaries" in the Rules Committee could not keep "liberal" legislation bottled up. The new rules permitted a committee chairman to get a bill on the calendar (with House approval) if the Rules Committee tries to do some "bottling-up".

This week, Rayburn did his stuff again. A combination of Republicans and Southern Democrats tried to repeal the "liberal" rule, but were foiled in their base design. Did that ensure consideration of the FEPC bill? Not so you could notice it. Sam, as Speaker, has the right to recognize any Member he chooses. In the great tradition of Texas liberals, he chose not to recognize Mr. Lesinski who wanted to talk about the FEPC bill. And he discovered in himself a passionate interest in that orphan of Capitol Hill, Alaskan statehood. Southern Members devoted the rest of the day to that fascinating subject. It could be weeks before FEPC would get on the calendar again. In short, Uncle Joe Cannon rides again, under the label of "liberal". That's what all the fuss was about.

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NOTES ON THE HISS CASE: Senator Bridges on January 24 asked Congress if a Kremlin conspiracy is still operating in the State Department. Naturally, many commentators, even conservatives, will brush this off as extravagant talk. They never

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learn, apparently; for many took the same attitude towards the Hiss affair when it was first broken by the House Un-American Activities Committee. It can be now revealed that most of the members of that committee, including the chief counsel, took a similarly skeptical view the evening of the day when they first listened to Hiss' story. How could such a high former official be guilty? However, there was one member of the staff, Mr. Benjamin Mandel, who reportedly opposed this view. He -- aided by Representative Clarence Brown -- prevailed on the Committee to go ahead with the probe; and he staged a secret interrogation of Chambers which brought out very persuasive evidence of the latter's relations with Hiss.

Where is the memorandum which Premier Mackenzie King of Canada gave to President Truman in 1946? This column was the first to report the existence of the document, and by now many papers accept the fact of its transmission to the White House. The memo is said to have contained a list of the principal Soviet agents in key places in the U.S. Government. The list was compiled by Igor Gouzenko, the Soviet coding clerk who broke the Canadian spy case.

Whom did Chambers refer to in an interview with the Baltimore Sun last Saturday? He said, "Actually there are five or six people -- some of them holding important positions in American life -- who saw us [Hiss and Chambers] together on a number of occasions and were with us. These people were, and presumably still are, members of the Communist Party." Chambers added that the name of one had been mentioned during the course of the recent trial.

How much influence did Hiss wield at Yalta, in shaping our policy there? He is on record, expressing pride in the work he did at that conference. Did he sway the decisions which have cost us so much? And what did he do at the San Francisco Conference when the UN was set up? Did he play a decisive role in establishing the UN veto? Should not an extensive investigation of his papers in the State Department archives be made? These matters require careful investigation, for those who have a vested interest in minimizing Hiss' role in these affairs are many.

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RED HERRING: Members of Congress who have followed up the Hiss conviction with reminders of Truman's priceless "red herring" remark have good reason for doing so. They recall the strange lethargy of the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations in face of evidence that espionage had been going on. They recall the rather peculiar attitude of Mr. Truman when evidence, serious enough to justify a Federal indictment, was brought to his notice. They might well point out that, in contrast to Mr. Truman, Premier Mackenzie King of Canada never cried "red herring" when confronted with evidence of the espionage ring. King was not a "reactionary"; on the contrary, he had been usually regarded as a Canadian New Dealer. Yet, King took some extraordinary and severe measures in his spy situation.

We cite the example of Canada, for we have had it dinned into our ears for some years now by "liberal" commentators that the Mackenzie King Administration conducted itself correctly, ethically and legally in contrast to the methods of that nasty old House Un-American Activities Committee. We refer the reader to that excellent volume Report of the Royal Commission which investigated the Russian spy ring in 1947. On pages 649 ff., we learn that Mackenzie King, instead of making a "red herring" joke, rushed through an Order in Council authorizing the Government to search premises without warrants, to arrest individuals suspected of espionage without warrants, to detain such individuals as long as deemed necessary -- in short, some rather extensive suspensions of habeas corpus and the Bill of Rights. And the Canadian officials proceeded to take such steps with dispatch and with results that are now history and very educational history at that. This Royal Commission, idol of our "liberals", reviewed their work in their report and found it was good, but not good enough. They stressed the fact that even with these precautions, some of

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the culprits got away, and despite alert action some of the evidence was destroyed. The picture of such exertions contrasts sharply with the posture of our valiant Commander-in-Chief when presented with evidence of activities which worked harm to our security. Was he not remiss in his duties in this interesting case?

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ACHESON ON SPAIN: Secretary Acheson's utterance on Spain should clear away many of the vapors obscuring our policy. Commendably, the Secretary admitted the mistake of the UN boycott and recognized that there is no alternative at present to the Franco regime. He quite properly made a move in the direction of full diplomatic relations with Madrid. Acheson also laid down very soundly the financial requisites for any loans which we might grant Spain. He rejected any general balance of payments loan and limited any loan to specific, justifiable and repayable Export-Import projects. As we have remarked previously in this column (December 14, 1949), there are elements in the Franco regime which cannot be trusted to handle money wisely and any credits should be carefully supervised.

Many observers, however, remain suspicious of the Secretary's motives. Was he laying the basis for later recognition of Communist China? If he was so doing, he left a crack in his logic when he said that Franco Spain was no menace to the peace of the world. That is quite true. But would it be true of the Communist regime in Peiping? Also, why does the Secretary still cling to hypocritical rubbish about the Spanish question? He says that the lily-white democratic States of Western Europe cannot abide association with the pariah in Madrid, which is a dictatorship. It is a dictatorship. But what is Portugal? It is now a 32nd degree member of all the lodges -- of ECA, MAP, Atlantic Union, etc; yet, Salazar's dictatorship is on a par with that of Franco's, and becoming more authoritarian, according to a recent article in the London Economist. Furthermore, Britain, France et al., two years ago issued a welcome to Iron Curtain regimes to join the Marshall Plan organization. Are those governments any less severe than that in Madrid? It is about time to question the real sincerity of London and Paris in dealing with Spain. We were told for years that any friendly move towards Spain would bring in its wake thunderous repercussions in those two capitals. Five days have passed since the Acheson statement; we have heard no calamitous noises. Mr. Acheson still has much to explain.

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THOUGHT WARFARE: It is an open secret in Washington that we have no effective agency to tell our case to the world and especially to the Russian people. Psychological warfare experts say that the job cannot be done by the Voice of America. Senator Flanders has demanded action to repair this shortcoming. In our issue of October 5, 1949, Bonner Fellers made a plea for constructive measures, saying "America possesses a golden opportunity to launch a psychological program against Russia". General Fellers, an aide to MacArthur in the Pacific campaign, was in charge of psychological warfare against Japan.

The General has now expanded his thesis in one of the HUMAN AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS (Henry Regnery Company, 20 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago 4, Illinois. 25 cents.) entitled 'Thought Warfare' Against the Kremlin. He gives specific details and an outline of what such a program should be, based on his own experience. And he describes the philosophy which must control such efforts, in the following impressive terms. "In this fateful contest on the psychological level", he says, "we have an advantage of terrific power -- the truth! The Kremlin is obliged to invent and propagate lies. Much of its energy must be devoted to concealing unsavory facts such as its slave labor and mass terror. Our thought offensive, by contrast, will be geared to the simple truths of our democratic freedoms, our higher economic standards, our genuine eagerness for friendship and peace with all peoples."

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Book Events

Letters from Albert Jay Nock. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd. $3.00.
Reviewed by Frank Chodorov.

In 1924, The Freeman announced its demise. For four years this highly civilized, though radical, publication had brought an uncommon satisfaction to a select readership, and the announcement caused some consternation; a respected, loved and irreplaceable friend was about to die. Many felt let down; three of them took counsel with themselves and decided to make an effort to prevent the disaster. They were: Edmund C. Evans, a Philadelphia architect, his wife and her sister. They called on Albert Jay Nock, the editor whose genius had given The Freeman its character, to see what could be done about it. Nevertheless, the paper went its appointed way; but out of this visit grew a friendship that lasted until the death of Mr. Evans, in 1934, and with the ladies until Mr. Nock finally laid down his pen, a dozen years later. And out of this friendship now comes a volume of the letters that cemented it; at least, those written by Mr. Nock.

These letters were written by a friend to friends, and are therefore free of the inhibitions of formal correspondence, the kind written with half an eye on posterity. For that reason they reveal facets of personality that, in a man known only for his public accomplishments, are of interest to his admirers. As you read them you recall -- if you have had that experience -- the kindly, courtly gentleman opposite you, discoursing intelligently on this and that, and punctuating his remarks with an occasional sip of beer. The man, not the author, is speaking.

The letters will indeed be relished by those who had any contact with Albert Jay Nock, for they help to revive memories, almost to bring him to life again. The great many more who know of him only through his writings will find in them a fillip to their admiration; for they let in light on the way the man thought when he was not arranging his thoughts for publication. To be sure, he was not one to give weight to matters of a personal nature, to ephemeral experiences unrelated to ideas, and the reader will not find in these letters any piquant facts to satisfy curiosity on that score. But, because he was writing "with his hair down", he inadvertently gives the reader a candid snapshot of his mind.

The book has a literary value far beyond its content. It is a contribution to the art of letter-writing and will be welcomed by those who still think of the art as an aid to graceful living. One is repeatedly called to a halt as he runs through these letters by the brilliancy of a phrase or a neat aphorism that ought properly to be set in an essay for public view. Yet it is merely part of a casual letter to friends, the kind that is fondly read, kept for a while and disappears in a waste basket. Imagine reading this postscript to a letter dealing with other matters: "How the language of diplomacy has changed. Formerly, when a foreign minister ended a note with Veuillez agreér l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus profonds et les plus distingués, you knew that a declaration of war was just around the corner. Now they call one another liars, pirates and horse-thieves, and nothing happens."

Or, if you do any amount of letter-writing, you cannot help but compare how you would express yourself in a similar position with the way Nock puts it: "The peculiarities of my own position have lately taught me a great deal about human nature -- nothing good. People who would not look at me a few years ago make themselves agreeable, evidently on account of my opposition to the New Deal. I am not responsive, saying that my only interest is in freedom and justice, and if they profit from it, the profit is only incidental."

In short, the book is an object-lesson in letter-writing at its best; cultivated yet easy, clean despite its informality, polished without any evidence of scrubbing. But, then, his conversation was also like that.

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